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THE LAST STAGE OF TEXAN MILITARY OPERATIONS
AGAINST MEXICO, 1843¹

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Although the story of the Texan struggle for independence from Mexico has been well told from numerous standpoints, there is one phase of her activities which has never been placed in its proper relation to the revolutionary movement. This is the series of operations carried on by Warfield and Snively in the north-western part of the territory to which the Texas government had laid claim. In practically every account Warfield has received a paragraph as a private raider, who had no connection with the government of the republic, while Snively has fared but little better, although the fact that he held instructions from the government has been more generally recognized.²

A careful study of the evidence would seem to indicate that the expeditions led by these two men, no matter how detached they may have been, were parts of the general Texan movement in opposition to the Mexican government, and not merely the isolated raids which they have usually been regarded. As such they deserve a place in the history of the Texan Revolution, scarcely less in importance than either the Santa Fé or the Mier expeditions. The avowed objects of the enterprises were in reality a combination of those of the other expeditions, and they attracted almost as much attention at the time in Texas itself. Yet the work of Snively and Warfield has remained in the background largely because no Kendall or Green chanced to have a part in it. It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to endeavor to place it in the proper perspective.

The Background for the Operations.—From the battle of San Jacinto to the Santa Fé expedition of 1841 the Republic of Texas had carried on an aggressive struggle against Mexico, both from

¹This paper is an extract from an M. A. thesis written in the seminar of Professor Bolton, at the University of California.

²See Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, 326-329; also Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas*, II, 371-372. These accounts are based largely upon *Niles' Register*, the author having had no access to the documentary material which has since been made available. They have been followed rather closely by Bloom, "New Mexico under Mexican Administration," in *Old Santa Fe*, II, 153-156.

the military and from the diplomatic point of view. Territorially, her claims extended considerably beyond the boundaries which she had accepted as a Mexican state, but her diplomats, not satisfied with the Rio Grande as a boundary, had even sought to annex an outlet to the Pacific. Her army had failed, however, to secure the recognition of her independence from the central government of Mexico, and her diplomats were equally unsuccessful in securing the necessary funds for continuing the struggle. Therefore, when she received the news, early in 1842, of the disastrous outcome of the Santa Fé expedition, her future seemed precarious indeed. Her financial standing in Europe was lowered as a result of this evidence of an inability to occupy the territory claimed by the government, and a damper was placed on the confidence which had been felt in France, especially, in her ability to maintain her independence. This naturally checked not only credit, but also immigration.³ In the United States the reaction to the stories which reached the people concerning the brutal treatment of the prisoners was decidedly favorable to Texas, but aside from the work done by Waddy Thompson, the United States minister to Mexico, in securing the release of the prisoners,⁴ no direct results came from that quarter.

The most immediate returns came from Mexico. The reports which reached that country concerning the expedition furnished a semblance of truth for the repeated rumors which had been coming to the capital from the outlying districts, of a Texan invasion. As a result, the determination of the central government to subdue the Texan revolution was renewed, and a new offensive was planned. The first definite outcome was the successful Mexican attack on San Antonio in March, 1842, when the invaders took possession of the town, and after remaining two days, gathered as much property as could be easily removed, and quickly withdrew across the Rio Grande.⁵ Dissension in the Texas militia prevented any immediate action, and in September a Mexican force under General Adrian Woll surprised the place again, this time capturing fifty-five inhabitants, who were marched off to

³Smith to Jones, March 31, 1843, in Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, III, 1429.

⁴Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico*, 92-100.

⁵Rives, *The United States and Mexico*, I, 485.

Mexico City and imprisoned.⁶ This act called for retaliation, and the militia under General Somervell began operations along the lower Rio Grande for the purpose of making "such reprisals upon Mexico as civilized and honorable warfare would justify."⁷ But when the commander decided to disband his force after occupying Laredo, about three hundred of his men set out to capture Mier. The result was a parallel for that of the Santa Fé expedition, 226 of them being captured and marched off to the Mexican capital to be imprisoned.⁸

The disastrous outcome of these operations in the lower Rio Grande valley proved to the Texans the futility of any efforts at retaliation in that direction; but in the meantime they were turning their attention to the northwestern part of the territory over which the government claimed jurisdiction. The previous lack of knowledge concerning the country had been dispelled to a large extent by the wanderings of the Santa Fé expedition, and the Texans now understood more adequately how to operate there. In addition, two factors of more importance seem to have been responsible for the determination to conduct operations in this region. In the first place, the treatment which had been accorded to the members of the Santa Fé expedition by the military authorities in New Mexico, together with the fact that the region itself still remained to be subjugated, had its influence on the Texan attitude. The other incentive was the fact that across this district ran the Santa Fé trail, still serving as the principal route of commercial intercourse between the United States and northern Mexico. Since regular Mexican troops had not penetrated this far north, it seemed that here were possibilities for effective retaliation at a minimum risk.

The Plan for Warfield's Expedition.—The officials of Texas took the stand that "a just retribution (and if need be, an instructive one) for injuries and cruelties inflicted by an enemy is always legitimate warfare," and for the purpose of having such retribution administered, the Secretary of War and Marine on

⁶Winkler, *The Bexar and Dawson Prisoners*, in *THE QUARTERLY*, XIII 294-313, publishes the diary of Anderson Hutchinson, one of the captives. At the time of his capture, Hutchinson was judge for the fourth judicial district of Texas.

⁷Green, *Journal of the Texian Expedition against Mier*, 479.

⁸*Ibid.*, 106.

August 16, 1842, authorized Charles A. Warfield to raise a force of men. He was given a colonel's commission, and for the purpose of avoiding any possible delay, he was told to commission such officers as he considered to be necessary, with the assurance that his appointments would be confirmed. His command was to be considered as in the service of Texas during the war, or until further orders, and its work was to levy contribution, capture Mexican property or places in the name of Texas, and to deliver to the government one-half of the spoils which might be taken from the enemy. The other half was to belong to the captors, and was to be distributed among the men, while an appropriation of public lands was also promised for the participants. Warfield was told to work as directly as possible toward Santa Fé, which, with such other towns as it was possible to conquer, was to be taken, and all Mexican property was to be confiscated.⁹ Upon his arrival at Santa Fé he was to await further instructions, and later developments indicate that the government had expected him to act immediately, for the purpose of attracting the attention of the New Mexicans while another Texan expedition was to cross the Rio Grande in the fall, and after occupying Santa Fé his command was to join this force.¹⁰

Warfield was well acquainted with the country in which he was to operate, having been for a number of years a resident of New Mexico, and having traveled over much of the southern Rocky Mountain region.¹¹ He at once began the work of raising his force, with the expectation of mustering between eight hundred and a thousand men. He apparently took it for granted that at least three hundred men would respond from Texas, and expected an equal number from the frontier of Arkansas. Consequently he went to Missouri, where he succeeded in enlisting a considerable number of frontiersmen. Then after naming May 15, 1843, as the date when the party was to assemble at the "Point of Rocks," within a short distance of the easternmost New Mexican settlements, he set out in the fall for the mountains, where he

⁹Hockley to Warfield, August 16, 1842, in *Sen. Ex. Doc.* 14, 32nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 117-118. Ser. No. 660.

¹⁰Jones to Van Zandt, June 8, 1843, in Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, II, 189.

¹¹Arrangoiz to Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations, May 6, 1843, MSS. in Bolton Collection, University of California.

expected to secure the services of the trappers and fur hunters.¹² In all cases of recruiting Warfield contended that his proposed expedition was justifiable under the rules of legitimate warfare, and his statement of its purpose made the main design that of annoying the Mexican frontier, intercepting their trade, and forcing them, if possible, to some terms by which a peace might be secured between Texas and Mexico. As inducements he presented the promises of his government, and dramatically displayed a tattered, bullet-pierced flag which had seen service in the early battles of the Texas struggle for freedom.¹³

Warfield's Military Operations.—The contingent of trappers met Warfield near the junction of the Rio de las Animas with the Arkansas, in March, and it was found that many "had volunteered with great readiness, so far as promises were concerned; but when performances were required, 'came up missing.'" ¹⁴ A little group of twenty-four men set out in two sections, however, on March 21, for the point where the volunteers "from the States" and the Texas force had been instructed to meet them in May. An interesting feature of this march shows something of the real purpose of the expedition. One afternoon a sentinel of one of the sections announced the approach of a small party of Mexicans, and immediately preparations were made to attack. It soon became evident that the expected enemy was hurriedly retreating, and a detachment of Texans set out in pursuit. After a chase of several miles, three members of the party were overtaken, but were found to be American and English traders on their way to the United States with a large quantity of gold and silver. They were at once released and allowed to proceed without being further molested.¹⁵ A few days later, three members

¹²Mitchell to Porter, April 21, 1843, in *Sen. Ex. Doc.* 14, 32nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 112-113. Ser. No. 660.

¹³Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains*, 244. Rufus B. Sage, the author, was one of Warfield's recruits among the western trappers, and has given some valuable, though meager information on the party's activities. For available reprints of the portion of this book dealing with the Texans, see Burton, "Texas Raiders in New Mexico in 1843," in *Old Santa Fe*, II, 309-322; 407-429.

¹⁴Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains*, 248.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 252. Sage adds, "A circumstance not likely to have happened had we been the gang of 'lawless desperadoes,' so hideously depicted in several of the public prints of the day."

of the little band were discharged for cowardice, Warfield advising them that "Texas wants no cowards to fight her battles."¹⁶

Early in May, while waiting for the expected reinforcements from Texas, this group surprised the military outpost of the town of Mora, killing five soldiers and capturing eighteen others, together with seventy-two head of horses. The prisoners were released, and owing to the presence of a large Mexican force in the vicinity, a retreat was begun.¹⁷ On the following day the horses were recaptured by the Mexicans, along with those belonging to the party, who then burned their saddles, and proceeded on foot to the neighborhood of Bent's Fort. After waiting here several days for information concerning the force which had been promised from Texas, Warfield abandoned hope, and on May 29 the force was disbanded.¹⁸

Opposition from the United States.—Warfield's activities had been brought into disfavor in the United States because of the capture and murder of Antonio Chavez, a New Mexican trader, by a party of Missourians under John McDaniel. Acting upon his authority to select and commission his own officers without first consulting the government, Warfield had issued such a commission to McDaniel,¹⁹ and his trust had been abused. While McDaniel's act was indirectly connected with the Texan aggressive movement, its nature did not entirely conform with the Texan view of legitimate retribution, and it was disavowed, while the principals in the raid were caught and punished by the United States authorities.²⁰

In addition to this, early in May a report from the United States Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the west, reached Washington. It contained a complaint concerning Warfield's recruiting activities in Missouri.²¹ The United States at once protested to Isaac Van Zandt, the Texan agent at Washington,²² who

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 261-262.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 266-267. For rumors which reached the United States concerning Warfield's activities, see *Niles' Register*, LXIV, 235, 290, 323.

¹⁹*Niles' Register*, LXIV, 386.

²⁰*Ibid.*, LXIV, 235.

²¹Mitchell to Porter, April 21, 1843, in *Sen. Ex. Doc.* 14, 32nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 112-113. Ser. No. 660.

²²Legare to Van Zandt, May 10, 1843, in *Ibid.*, 112.

denied any knowledge of the Warfield party.²³ But two months later, after he had communicated with his government, Van Zandt was able to furnish to the American Secretary of State a copy of the instructions to Colonel Warfield, together with a protest that these instructions did not authorize him to enlist men or organize an expedition within the limits of the United States.²⁴

This correspondence had the effect of recalling to the Texan officials the fact that they had not heard from Warfield, for after the failure of the contemplated Rio Grande expedition to materialize he seems to have been forgotten. Since he had been told to act immediately, it had been supposed in Austin that his proposed expedition had been abandoned. So now, in order to meet the new international situation which had arisen, a letter was sent to Van Zandt, revoking Warfield's authority. This was to be forwarded to him whenever his whereabouts could be ascertained.²⁵ Long before this series of correspondence was culminated, Warfield himself had removed the cause by disbanding his force near Bent's Fort, and he, with a few of his followers, had set out for Texas.²⁶

The Purpose and Plans of the Snively Expedition.—In the meantime, the trade along the Santa Fé trail was being continued, and the Texans took the stand that such trade crossing their territory was subject to customs duty. They had no effective means of collecting such duties,²⁷ and, therefore, for the purpose of stopping the so-called illicit and contraband commerce, President Houston was induced to authorize Major Jacob Snively to raise a partisan force and go into the region. In the instructions which Snively received from the acting Secretary of War and Marine of Texas, however, the object which was em-

²³Van Zandt to Legare, June 1, 1843, in *Ibid.*, 113-114.

²⁴Van Zandt to Upshur, August 4, 1843, in *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁵Jones to Van Zandt, June 8, 1843, in Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, II, 189.

²⁶Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains*, 267-268.

²⁷For an illustration of the difficulties of a Texas customs official, see Bourland to Secretary of Treasury (of Texas), May 4, 1843, in *Sen. Doc.* 1, 28 Cong., 2nd Sess., 93-95. Ser. No. 449. In March some traders from the United States had unloaded merchandise from a river steamer on Texas soil without making the necessary entries. The merchandise was confiscated by James Bourland, collector for the Red River district, and as a result, the Americans surprised and bound him, broke open the customs house, recovered their goods, and proceeded on their way.

phasized was that of retaliation and reclamation for injuries which had been sustained by Texans at the hands of Mexican soldiers. His force was to be raised and maintained without any expense to the government, and was to operate in any portion of Texas above the settlements, and between the Rio Grande and the boundary of the United States. Any merchandise or property belonging to Mexican citizens was to be considered as a lawful prize, and as in Warfield's instructions, half of the spoils was to go to the government, while the other half was to be divided among the members of the party.²⁸

This amounted to nothing more than a letter of reprisal, granting permission to operate at will within certain limits, and as such it was construed by the men who took part. Among the people of Texas, however, the general understanding was that the expedition was to descend on Santa Fé to capture "the tyrant Armijo, and the traitor Lewis," and, if favorably received by the New Mexicans, so great was the optimism that it was thought probable that it would make a descent upon Chihuahua, and ultimately revolutionize the whole of northern Mexico.²⁹

A party of about two hundred men was raised, and the command started from Georgetown, on April 25, 1843,³⁰ well armed and well supplied with provisions. The experience of the Santa Fé expedition in the matter of supplies evidently served as a warning, for the arrangements at this time were that for every two men there should be a pack mule, carrying about one hundred pounds of dried beef and a supply of flour.³¹ After about a month of marching in a northwesterly direction, the force turned south, believing itself to be west of the one hundredth meridian, and proceeded to the Arkansas River for the purpose of intercepting a caravan of Mexican traders which had left St. Louis in the spring.³² Here it was joined by Warfield, with the

²⁸Hamilton to Snively, February 16, 1843, in Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, II, 217-218.

²⁹*Niles' Register*, LXIV, 210.

³⁰Snively to Hill, July 9, 1843, in Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, II, 218.

³¹*Niles' Register*, LXIV, 290.

³²Snively to Hill, July 9, 1843, in Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, II, 218; and also accounts given by members of the party, in *Niles' Register*, LXIV, 406.

remnant of his party which had decided to accompany him to Texas.

The Reaction to Warfield's Work.—By this time information concerning Warfield's activities had reached the United States, and the belief that the trade caravans were to be the prey of the Texans led General Almonte, the Mexican minister at Washington, to request that an armed escort be furnished for the Mexican merchants who were leaving Missouri for Santa Fé. As a result, a detachment of troops under Captain Philip St. George Cooke was ordered to accompany the caravan "as far as the territory of the United States extended on the route to Santa Fé."³³

At the new Mexico end of the trail, the persistent rumors which came in concerning a second Texan expedition against Santa Fé brought new activity from Governor Armijo. An appeal was sent to Mariano Monterde, the governor and commandant of Chihuahua, for assistance; and that official at once began the work of raising troops in the vicinity of El Paso for the purpose of aiding Armijo "in case the Texans dare to place a profaning foot upon Mexican territory."³⁴ Monterde delayed the action of these troops, however, until he could bring reinforcements from his capital,³⁵ and in addition a report was sent to the central government, stating that he had turned his own government over to his lieutenant in order to go to New Mexico to punish invaders from Texas.³⁶ Before he could arrive, however, Armijo had found it necessary to raise a detachment to meet the trade caravan at the Arkansas for the purpose of furnishing the protection needed for the last stage of the journey. To make up the necessary number, he was forced to impress into service the militia of Taos, a region which had remained antagonistic to him, and he used that division as his advance party.³⁷

³³Upshur to Van Zandt, January 16, 1844, in *Ibid.*, II, 244. In *Sen. Doc.* 1, 28th Cong., 2nd Sess., 101, this same letter is dated January 19, 1844, but this is evidently a typographical error, since Van Zandt's reply refers to the communication of the "16th ultimo." Van Zandt to Upshur, February 21, 1844, in *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁴Extract from Monterde to Armijo, April 15, 1843, in Bloom, "New Mexico under Mexican Administration," in *Old Santa Fe*, II, 154.

³⁵Ugarte to Acting General of the Department of New Mexico, June 29, 1843, in *Ibid.*, II, 154.

³⁶Bolton, *Guide to Materials for the History of the United States in the Principal Archives of Mexico*, 326.

³⁷Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, II, 172-173.

Information concerning the plans of the Texans was also reaching the Mexican capital from representatives in the United States. Arrangoiz, the Mexican consul at New Orleans, was keeping himself informed upon the developments in Texas, and in the government archives of Mexico numerous letters are to be found in which he gives valuable information to his government. On May 6, 1843, he reported fully concerning Warfield's activities, and on May 19 he was able to send the news of the starting of the Snively expedition. To this warning there was added, during the following month, the voice of General Almonte from Washington.³⁸ The impression conveyed by these letters was that the expeditions were being fostered by the United States, and therefore considerable alarm was felt in Mexico. With information coming from so many sources, President Santa Anna felt that it was time to act. Therefore, on August 7, 1843, he issued a decree by which the frontier customs houses at Taos, in New Mexico, and Paso del Norte and Presidio del Norte, in Chihuahua, were entirely closed to all commerce.³⁹ This meant that trade to the north was to cease.

But in the meantime new complications had arisen. In the summer of 1843 the efforts of the British agent in Texas to bring about an adjustment of the difficulties between Texas and Mexico led to a temporary suspension of hostilities in order that the arrangements for a negotiation might be made.⁴⁰ This was on June 15, and a month later General Woll, commanding the Mexican army in the north, demanded of the Texas government either a declaration that the forces which composed the expedition against Santa Fé did not have the sanction of the government, in which case they could be treated as outlaws, or else, an assurance that

³⁸Transcripts of the letters of Arrangoiz and Almonte to the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations are in the Bolton Collection, University of California.

³⁹*Niles' Register*, LXV, 166. The inference drawn by the newspapers of the time was that this decree was a result of a misunderstanding between Waddy Thompson and Bocanegra, the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations. If such was the case, it was undoubtedly because of the Mexican supposition that the United States was responsible for the Texan operations. See Thompson to Bocanegra, August 14, 1843, in *Ibid.*, LXV, 167.

⁴⁰*Niles' Register*, LXIV, 307.

they had been notified to suspend hostilities.⁴¹ The Texas officials had been unable to communicate with Snively and Warfield to notify them of the agreement, and to obviate this difficulty, therefore, General Woll was given a copy of the revocation of Warfield's orders, and a copy of the proclamation declaring an armistice, with an order to Snively endorsed on it, giving Mexican officers the authority to show them the copies in case they should appear, and demanding that they return to the interior settlements of Texas.⁴² These orders were never delivered, and Snively conducted his principal operations during the period of the armistice. But the significant fact is that it was considered essential to make an effort to reach these two men.

Effect of the Reaction Upon Snively.—Snively's men and the advance party of Armijo's force reached the point where the trail crossed the Arkansas River at about the same time. A detachment of Texans led by Warfield immediately attacked the Taos militia, and in the skirmish all but two of the New Mexicans were either killed or captured. The prisoners were later released, and upon their return to Armijo with the news of the encounter he retreated hurriedly to Santa Fé.⁴³ The Texans then went into camp to await the arrival of the caravan. Within a few days it appeared, but before Snively fully realized what was happening, Captain Cooke had covered his camp, and demanded his surrender on the grounds that the party was in United States territory. Snively protested vigorously, but, owing to the superiority of the American force, the Texans had no alternative, and after practically disarming them Cooke allowed them to return to Texas.⁴⁴ Some of the Texans, disappointed at losing the opportunity of convincing Governor Armijo "that he was not a Napoleon," accused Snively of selling out to Cooke,⁴⁵ and there was a general disappointment in Texas because Santa Fé had not been taken. The principal result of this episode was the

⁴¹Woll to Houston, July 16, 1843, in Adams, *Correspondence in the British Archives Concerning Texas*, in *THE QUARTERLY*, XVII, 85-86.

⁴²Hill to Woll, July 29, 1843, in *Ibid.*, XVII, 87.

⁴³Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, II, 169-170; also *Niles' Register*, LXIV, 354, and Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, II, 86.

⁴⁴Snively to Hill, July 9, 1843, in Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, II, 218-220.

⁴⁵*Niles Register*, LXIV, 406.

involving of Texas in a controversy with the United States concerning the location of the boundary; but no definite settlement was made, although Cooke was court-martialed and exonerated. The United States agreed, however, to pay the Texans for the firearms which had been confiscated, and with this the subject was dropped.⁴⁶ The interesting feature of this event lies in the fact that the trap which caught Snively was set by the authorities of the United States for the purpose of catching the War-field party.

Conclusion.—This brought to an end all effort on the part of Texas to either occupy or control the New Mexico territory under the government of the republic, and so far the only tangible results seemed adverse to the Texan interests. Not only had all her attempts at occupation proved futile, but each effort had turned a new group of the New Mexican population from an attitude of indifference to one of hostility, and had added materially to the probability of a continued failure.

These campaigns also mark the final steps in the aggressive policy of the Texan republic from a military point of view. The commission to Snively was the last to be issued by the government for the purpose of carrying the war into Mexican territory, and with the exception of the work done by Colonel Hayes in the southern district in 1844 in preparation for a rumored Mexican invasion, which did not materialize, it constitutes the last stage of the military operations against Mexico. The reason is not difficult to find. In the first place, the republic was exhausted financially; but of greater importance is the fact that at about the same time that these operations were being brought to a disappointing end, political events in the United States were shaping themselves favorably toward annexation. This at once became the interest-absorbing question for the Texans, and aggression was forced to the background.

⁴⁶For the correspondence on the subject, see *Sen. Doc.* 1, 28th Cong., 2nd Sess., 96-112. Ser. No. 449.